

Holy Week Individual Devotional

START HERE: A Thought on Holy Week from David Mathis:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/make-the-most-of-holy-week>

PALM SUNDAY: Triumphal Entry, Read Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus came to Jerusalem to be crowned. He signaled His royal status by the manner in which He came. Zechariah 9:9-10 points to the Messianic King coming to Jerusalem riding a donkey's colt and that He would end Israel's war against the nations. However, the people did not recognize the self-sacrifice that was required for the Messiah's victory. Jesus lives-out Psalm 118's prophecy and the people respond in kind, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" They miss that the Messiah would be opposed, rejected and ultimately forced to rely on God for eternal life. His crown would be a crown of thorns. Through His rejection and sacrifice He would become the source of salvation for the nations.

This is so important for our time, as we consider what it really means to be Jesus' Church when so many of the trappings that have commonly identified a church are taken away. In some ways, we are struck down, Though we are a people that rely on God for our eternal life and we move forward in that knowledge and hope. As we meditate on this Palm Sunday scripture, let us not cling to a semblance of victory that we can see in the physical, but to the victory that only Christ can accomplish on our behalf. We may not feel crowned right now, but may we be chastened and tempered through our suffering and rise victorious in Jesus!

Here is an interesting Bible Project video that explores this sacrificial kingship through the Bible. <https://youtu.be/3dEh25pduQ8>

Prayer

Holy Father, we are experiencing suffering right now, and we are dismayed at the disruption of our lives and our church services. However, we remember that you suffered before us, on our behalf, so that we may rise victorious over death and suffering, because of our faith in you.

Give us eyes that rise above our desire for earthly victory and focus on your eternal victory.

MONDAY: The Overturning of the Money Changers' Tables, Read Mark 11:15-19

For many, this was just the way things were. Sacrificial animals and ceremonially clean money always cost more at the Temple. Sacrifice was a transaction, born out of cultural expectation. Maybe this sacrifice would appease God so we could get on with our lives? Then, along came Jesus. Why was He so angry? Why would He turn the expected traditions, and tables, upside down?

Sacrifice is meant to cost us...big! Not because God wants money, but because He wants us to understand the destructiveness of our hard and calloused hearts. Our sins damage relationship with Him, those around us and ultimately the whole world God created. Sacrifice that costs us brings a realization of our need for salvation and the need for the world to be made whole. It is meant to direct our attention from within ourselves to God and to others. As the One who came to be the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus was offended by the predatory practices of the sellers at the Temple. While overcharging the poor, they also cheapened the act of sacrifice. They turned a God-instituted act of worship into an idolatry of money.

This is a good time to search our hearts for and repent from the things we have elevated over Jesus, even in the name of our faith. Here is a Bible Project video that explores the nature of sacrifice and how Jesus has become the sacrifice we need. https://youtu.be/G_OIRWGLdnw

Prayer

Lord, I bring you my life, interests and desires and I give them to you. Please show me where I have elevated anything above my love for you. Forgive me of that idolatry and give me a new heart that beats for you alone and help me to reprioritize the things under my control. Because of your sacrifice, help me to sacrifice anything that competes with you.

TUESDAY: Judas' Betrayal, Read Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16

It is easy for us to point out Judas' betrayal as wrong from a comfortable distance, but the truth is that we humans all struggle with breaking trust on account of our sinful thoughts, words and actions. We call that *transgression*. In some capacity we are just as guilty of betraying God in our transgressions against Him, and other people, as Judas was in betraying Jesus. We may feel justified in the moment, but later we wind up regretting what we've done just as he did. We also know the pain of having been betrayed by others.

This week is a good time to think of the ways we have broken others' trust or failed to be the neighbor we are meant to be. This is a good time to seek forgiveness or forgive another person's offense and attempt, if possible, to restore broken relationships. We can even seek to create new and better ones.

Here is a video by the Bible Project that helps make sense of the biblical concept of transgression. <https://youtu.be/cq-r9FFN5ew>

Prayer

Lord, I recognize that I am not righteous on my own. I am guilty of transgression against you and others. Thank you for showing me, through Judas, how much pain that brings. Please forgive me for the ways I have transgressed your trust and the trust of others and help me to forgive others of their transgressions, as well. Help me to be faithful and walk in integrity.

WEDNESDAY: Day of Quiet, Read Psalm 19:7-14; 1 and John 3:19-24

Wednesday of Holy Week has traditionally been called a day of quiet and contemplation. We are not sure exactly what Jesus did, though likely it was a day of teaching and ceremonial preparation before the Passover meal.

On this day, the Jewish people would be making sure they were free of a guilty conscience before God and would ensure any yeast was removed from their homes which Paul links to the creeping way sin grows and infects hearts (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). They would ensure their selected lamb to be presented as a paschal sacrifice for their families was spotless; they would prepare the elements of the Passover and First-Fruits Festivals.

Jesus has been sacrificed for us once for all (Hebrews 10:1-14), so we no longer need to select a lamb for sacrifice – our trust is in Him alone – but we can take time today to prepare our hearts for our commemoration of Jesus' last days on earth and the following celebration of His resurrection. Where is your heart today?

If you are interested, here is a quick modern Jewish look at similar preparations for the Passover. <https://www.learnreligions.com/preparing-for-pesach-2076948>

Prayer

Father, thank you for a time of quiet contemplation, where I can take stock of life – the good and the sinful – and prepare my heart for what's coming. I thank you that I don't need to sacrifice an animal to be made right with you; Jesus did that for me. Help me to be identified in Him and think about what it means for Jesus to be a spotless sacrifice. Help me to see my sin for the wall it is between us and help me to kill sin in my life by the help of your Holy Spirit, so I can be ever conformed to the image of your Son.

THURSDAY: Maundy Thursday, Read Luke 22:14-20, 47-54

On Thursday, Jesus commemorated Passover with His disciples in the Upper Room. In their celebration meal, called the Seder, Jesus pointed to how the elements of the meal – the bread made without yeast, the wine, the Passover lamb; elements that we use in our Lord's Supper – all pointed to Him and the sacrifice He was about to make for all who would place faith in Him. His arrest was not far away.

Many churches hold Thursday services with Messianic Seders, foot washings (John 13:1-17), or reflection on how Jesus has loved us. Often these services start with celebration but end on a somber note. Our Jesus has been led away to suffer and die.

Here is a short video from Jews for Jesus that shows how the ancient Passover festival points to Jesus' sacrifice for us.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4XyYv991h4>

If you are interested in learning more about the Passover and its elements, here is a helpful guide: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-seder-plate/>

Prayer

Borrowing from the Seder prayers – Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the vine and bread from the earth. You have given these symbols in advance to teach us about your ability to save us from danger, death and plague. They also point us to the work of your Son, Jesus, and we place our faith in Him to save us. He is our Passover Lamb. No matter what happens to us on earth, through faith in His blood, we have eternal salvation and will be with you forever. Amen!

GOOD FRIDAY Morning: Read Matthew 27:11-51

On Friday, Jesus is tried, tortured and executed as a criminal, though He had done no wrong. Scripture tells us that for people to be cleansed of sin, a perfect man must die (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53:1-12; Romans 5:6-21). Only through this death can we be reconciled to God; but God loved us so much that He did not withhold His Son from us, and His Son was sacrificed willingly (John 3:14-17; Hebrews 12:1-3). Jesus died for you.

As part of our worship experience today, Pastor Jon will be leading us through taking communion together in our homes. Take some time today to consider His sacrifice on your behalf. What does Jesus' sacrifice mean for your life? In what ways does His sacrificial death change you? What does taking of the Communion symbols mean to you?

Here is a Bible Project video that walks through the last part of the Gospel of Matthew. Clarify God's mission to save us and Jesus' part in it.

<https://youtu.be/GGCF3OPWN14>

Prayer

Abba, Daddy, I know I don't deserve to have someone die in my place. At a time when so many are dying, I think I understand the preciousness of a life and what that cost means. Yet You, and Your Son, Jesus, were willing to fulfill Scripture for us, for me, so that we would be reconciled, and You would not hold my sin against me. It is hard to call such a horrendous death "good", but what you have done is good for us. Thank you for the cross. Jesus, thank you for your self-sacrificing love. Help me run to you for my salvation. Teach me what it means to pick up my own cross and follow you.

SATURDAY: Day of Lament, Read Matthew 27:57-66

This is a day of lament and sorrow. Think of what it meant to those first disciples who walked with Jesus, learned from Him and longed for victory. Now there are questions and perceived loss. Jesus told them it would be like this, but can someone really rise from the dead? Can the grave, oppression and sin really be defeated? Sometimes God feels distant and we wonder where He is. Can He really bring victory out of what feels like defeat? We want to move quickly past those feelings and get to the celebratory part, but that doesn't prepare us well for the times we must all face when life feels unfair and God doesn't appear to care. Sometimes we must respond with lament – running to the very Daddy who feels distant, trusting that He is good.

Today is a day to respond to Jesus' death with lament and to ask God the tough questions about your own life. Where are You, God, in this area? Where are You in the time of pandemic? God is big enough to handle our questions. Today is also a day to remind your heart of God's former faithfulness to help us trust Him for our future.

Prayer

Today let's pray directly from Scripture. Pray through Psalm 42. Go slow. Consider each line and what it means in your life right now. Think also what it would mean if Jesus had not died sacrificially for you and you were left to your own devices. Then remind yourself of God's goodness – the way He has cared for you and that you do have an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 John 2:1). Put your hope in God.

EASTER SUNDAY: Read John 20

Can you believe it? Jesus actually rose from the dead! That's important for our faith because it proves that what He taught us is true. It proves His victory over sin and death. It means He really is the God-Man and worthy of our trust. Our hope of salvation is found in this good news.

This is a day for a celebration that is worthy of sharing! Invite friends, neighbors and extended family to tune into our Resurrection Celebration. Remind them of the importance of this day. This hope is so important now, in light of the fear and hopelessness we see modeled by the world around us.

Here is a Bible Project video about the good news you can share and talk about before inviting people to worship with us. <https://youtu.be/xmFPS0f-kzs> How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!